Long-term stability of tawny owl (Strix aluco) population despite varying environmental conditions – a case study from central Poland

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INTRODUCTION

In the case of secondary hole-nesting birds, the availability of places to nest is typically indicated as a key factor influencing population size (East and Perrins 1988, Newton 1994, Bolton et al. 2004, Lõhmus and Remm 2005, Miller 2010). It is an important factor also in the case of owls (Petty et al. 1994, Gottschalk et al. 2011).

The tawny owl (Strix aluco) is the most abundant owl species in Poland (Tomiałojć and Stawarczyk 2003) and in Europe (see review in Petty and Saurola 1997). In the wild, this species breeds in both large tree-holes and the stumps of dead trees, as well as – occasionally – in the abandoned nests of birds of prey. In the presence of typical anthropogenic impacts on the landscape resulting in reduced numbers of shelters of natural origin, tawny owls also sometimes nest in buildings, or in nest-boxes provided for them (Petty et al. 1994). There are even known cases of the owls laying eggs on the ground (Mebs and Scherzinger 2000), in the burrows of rabbits (Oryctolagus cuniculus) (Mikkola and Willis 1983), or beneath the seat of an abandoned car (Dowell 1979). Considering that in nat-